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The 28th Street Site

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IN THE southeast corner of the City of Erie, Pennsylvania, and between East 28th Street and the Philadelphia and Erie Railroad, there stands a mesa-like column of gravel, all that remains of a broad sloping knoll since largely removed by gravel operations. This wooded hilltop, known variously as the Downing property, First P. and E. Woods and Ebersole's or Schouler's Woods, comprises but a fraction of an extensive gravel bench stretching across the southeastern edge of the City. For nearly a century an incalculable number of Indian burials have been periodically unearthed here as sections of the ridge were cut away for gravel. Such discoveries have occasionally been cited in the literature¹; local tradition records many more.

Two of these records that most certainly apply to the small area in question are worthy of mention. Stanford refers to the discovery in Schouler's Woods of a "large skeleton with two copper bowls perforated at the edges and laced together with a buckskin thong, which fell to dust soon after being exposed to the air. The bowls, which would hold about a pint each, were found filled with beads."² From this same wooded knoll, sometime around the turn of the century, a Captain MacGrow is reported to have unearthed several burials. His alleged discoveries included 3 pipes, a bearclaw necklace, the lock from a flintlock gun, blue and red glass trade beads, copper beads an inch in length, a strip of silver 1" x ½" and 12-15 triangular arrowheads.

However, no systematic exploration was attempted here until relatively late years. At that time three parties successively con-

centrated their efforts upon this small hilltop section which had remained untouched by gravel operations. Even so the picture is most confusing. In 1930 Mr. Kenneth R. Pfirman and the Reverend Theodore H. Althof, both of Erie, unearthed Graves 1-6 as listed in this article, recovering a number of artifacts now in their private collections. Four years later a Pennsylvania Historical Commission expedition under the leadership of Mr. Donald A. Cadzow explored the area immediately adjoining the Pfirman and Althof excavations and discovered Graves 7-18 plus the burial of a dog. Finally, in 1937 Mr. Harry L. Schoff of the Frontier Forts and Trails Survey removed Graves 19-24 from areas adjacent to the earlier diggings.

A total of twenty-four graves, containing the skeletons of some thirty adults and children, have been listed in the accompanying Burial Notes. It should be kept in mind, however, that this by no means represents the total number of graves in the cemetery, for there is ample evidence attesting the destruction of skeletons in earlier years. Thus, all three parties observed small clusters of bone protruding from the banks, unquestionably remnants of destroyed burials. Furthermore, the two later expeditions exposed a number of disturbed graves, probably ones opened earlier and described in the Burial Notes, although possibly representing new and unlisted graves. Finally, contemporary newspaper accounts record that night vandals destroyed a grave with two skeletons, beads and possibly other artifacts during the 1934 excavation.³ One last note. The rather

embarrassing fact remains that the nature of the excavation here leaves open the possibility of future discoveries.

Such is the background of the exploration of the 28th Street Site. To the enthusiastic student of local archeology who rightfully desires a detailed and critical analysis of this all-important station, the following report will come as a keen disappointment. Yet the limited number of reliable data permits little more

than briefest outline. We regret to say this; the fact remains. In partial compensation, the bulk of the objects recovered are illustrated in this account. Moreover, the material itself may be seen in part on display in the State Museum, Harrisburg, and the Old Customs House, Erie, while the field notes are on file in the Library of the American Philosophical Society and the archives of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

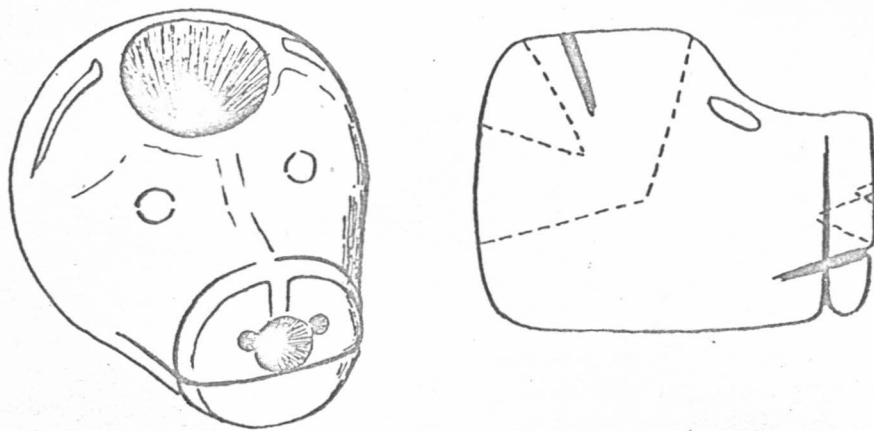


FIGURE 1

BURIAL NOTES

Burial	Position	Depth	Head Facing	Condition	Accompanying artifacts
1	Young adult?	2'		Few frag.	Pot (Pl. 6, b) near skull; 17 blue glass beads (Pl. 2, 14) near neck
2		1.5-2.5'		6 teeth, skull frag.	Pot (Pl. 1); pipe (Pl. 2, 3); 2 brass bells (Pl. 2, 2); red catlinite bead, (Pl. 2, 4); shell bead (Pl. 2, 5); 425 opaque blue and white beads (Pl. 2, 1); metal scissor blade with adhering rawhide (?)
3		2'	N W	Only cranium	Near skull: 11 red tubular glass beads, one twisted (Pl. 2, 6); 34 blue glass beads (Pl. 2, 7); string of 10 copper beads with rawhide cord (Pl. 2, 8); 5 shell beads (Pl. 2, 9-13); section of preserved hide (Pl. 3, 4).
4		1'			Pot (not illustrated)
5	Loosely flexed	15'	SE SW	Very poor	Shell bead (Pl. 2, 15)
6	Burial?			No bone	73 sherds with corded exterior, smoothed within, probably from a single pot (Pl. 3, 6); notched pebble combination netsinker and hammerstone (Pl. 3, 7).
7	Bundle?	2'5"		Skull, few bones	Near skull: pot (Pl. 4, a); 16 blue glass beads; small iron ring.

BURIAL NOTES

Burial	Position	Depth	Head	Facing	Condition	Accompanying artifacts
8	Loosely flexed	3'5"	S	W	Poor	Near vertebrae: triangular point turned white by fire (Pl. 9, b)
9	Adult bundle?	2'			Very poor	
10a	Flexed adult	2'11"			Poor	Pot (Pl. 5, a)
b	Child				Poor	
11	Flexed adult	3'			Very poor	
12	Adult	3'2"			Very poor	Pot (Pl. 4, b) behind skull
13	Flexed adult (?)	3'2"				Pot (Pl. 5, b)
14		3'7"			Very poor	Burial possibly contemporaneous with Nos. 10, 11, and 12. Small bar-shaped whetstone (?) with red paint stains; a few blue glass beads; brass rattle with fabric (Pl. 10, h); hawk bell (Pl. 10, b) with piece of fur
15	Loosely flexed adult	3'7"	SEE	NE	Poor	2 iron bracelets on left radius; 2 red and blue glass tubular beads; many blue glass seed beads; 4 small red glass beads; red ochre; turtle shell cup; beaver (?) pouch (?) remains; brass finger ring; brass spoon (Pl. 10, f) with piece of basketry; lump of blue clay; iron knife with wooden or antler handle; iron axe — the latter all near skull and neck
16	Loosely flexed adult		NE	NNW	Fair	Near skull: pot (Pl. 6, c); pipe (Pl. 9, a); a number of blue and white glass seed beads on a buckskin strip around neck; small tubular copper or brass beads on thong; perforated shell ornament, 2 shell beads and conch whorl (Pl. 9, c); bone implements; bark and hide under skull. On left radius: 2 chert scrapers with serrated edges; on pelvis, 3 similar pieces.
17	Disturbed area 3'9" x 8'2" x 3'10"				Only skull of child	Near skull: small blue glass beads; red paint, lump of unfired blue clay
18a	Flexed adult	2'3"	E	SSW	Poor	Small, crude pot (Pl. 6, a) containing food remains and brass rattle (Pl. 10, g) and isolated from skeleton but in the disturbed area
b	Flexed adult	About 2'				
19a	Flexed adult		E	S	Poor	Unbroken pot (Pl. 7, b) at skull
b	Flexed adult		E	S	Very poor	At left ulna—broken pot (Pl. 7, a); near lumbar region—small iron celt, 2 small iron knives, and a flint and steel
20	Adult				Disturbed	Pot (Pl. 7, c) behind skull
21a	Flexed adult		E	S	Very poor	3 skeletons in close proximity. The following objects lay near skeleton "a": remains of a large circular shell gorget on sternum (Pl. 9, e); large iron axe on right humerus; several dozen small blue and white glass beads around neck; 7 triangular chert points at knees (Pl. 8, a); brass stains on left tibia; pipe bowl (Pl. 10, b).
b	Flexed adult		W	S	Very poor	
c	Flexed adult		E	S	Very poor	
22	Flexed adult		E	S	Very poor	Large conch columella bead behind skull; 2 triangular points at knees
23	Flexed adult		E	S	Very poor	Red paint stain on top of skull. Near neck: 7 red glass bugle beads (Pl. 8, b) and 3 shell beads (Pl. 9, d) and a quantity of small blue glass beads. Before face: unbroken pipe (Pl. 10, e), small iron chisel and 2 large pieces of iron
24	Extended adult		E	S	Poor	Several 14" x 1" strips of brass preserving buckskin thongs, leather and fur lay along left ulna.
	Dog	4'1"	ENE		Good	Bark covering and yellow ochre near neck (?)

ARTIFACTS

Pottery

Although all of the thirteen pottery vessels obtained from this site belong to the same general pattern and presumably are to be assigned to a single component, one of the outstanding features about them is their variation. No two jars are of the same style. And yet at the same time, over half lay in graves directly associated with European trade goods assignable to a limited time period. From this we may infer the coexistence of varied pottery traditions and reject an explanation of drift over a long time span.

It is also important to note that each of these pottery styles readily follows one of the characteristic Erie patterns as illustrated by Parker⁴ and Skinner.⁵ This is particularly true when one notes the striking parallels between the 28th Street and Ripley sites, the latter apparently an Erie station of 1600-1620.⁶ Thus, our inference of a diversified fictile tradition at the 28th Street Site may well characterize the Erie in general during the first half of the 17th century.

This variation is by no means limited to form. The exteriors of two vessels are corded (Pl. 3, 6; Pl. 4, a) while the remainder are smoothed, ranging up to a hard polish (Pl. 5, b). One vessel, a thin jar with oblong neck and body, alone is shell-tempered (Pl. 6, c); another specimen has grog of mica (Pl. 5, a). As a group the pots demonstrate a high level of craftsmanship, but the smallest vessel is extremely crude and irregular, hard but not polished, and by no means the finest product of a skilled potter (Pl. 6, a).

Since the accompanying photographs with their side-view illustrations make it difficult to determine the number of castellations on certain pottery vessels, the following note may be of aid to the reader. Four castellations: Plates 4, a, b; 5, a. Three castellations: Plate 7, a, c. Two castellations: Plates 6, c; 7, b.

There would appear to be no objections

to the identification of this pottery as Erie of the 1630-1645 period. Associated European trade goods offer an excellent "time anchor" while the geographical location of the site within this time span permits little choice in the identity of the inhabitants. The surrounding region is generally conceded to have been the political and cultural center of a number of loosely affiliated tribes collectively grouped under the title "Erie Nation," and indeed, somewhere in the immediate area stood the palisaded Erie town of Rique, repeatedly referred to by the Jesuits as the Erie capital and destroyed by the Seneca in 1656.

Several parallels are of considerable interest. Thus, in many ways, the pottery vessel depicted in Plate 1 is quite similar to a jar from the McFate site, a Monongahela-like component lying some thirty miles south of here. However, with these two vessels similarities stop. Turning toward the northeast, there are two stations near Westfield, New York, excavated some years ago by Mr. Ross Pier Wright, but as yet not fully studied or described. Here, on at least one of these sites there appear to exist two distinct components: the first, thought by many to be perhaps the earliest recognized Iroquois station, with pottery vessels that at times resemble certain 28th Street specimens and with a few Iroquois and Canandaigua pipes; the second with McFate-like pottery, probably representing the northern-most thrust of the Monongahela Aspect. This latter component is considered by some to antedate the former, a conclusion difficult to reconcile with existing data.

Pipes

A total of four pipes, two of earthenware in the familiar "ringed bowl" form (Pl. 10, d, e) and two of stone, occurred in graves. Of the latter, one is delicately carved of a soft, creamy stone to depict the head of a pig (Fig. 1; Pl. 2, 3), while the simpler is of limestone or a talc-like stone, undecorated and with two cone-shaped holes (Pl. 9, a).

Objects of European Manufacture

Iron: Standard French-type felling axe (Pl. 10, a); small belt axe; celt-like axe (Pl. 8, c); chisel (Pl. 8, d); fire-making steel; scissor blade; finger ring and 2 bracelets; 2 knife blades; knife with wooden or antler handle; 2 large pieces of badly oxidized iron.

Brass and Copper: Brass rattle made of 2 multi-perforated concave discs (Pl. 10, g); a similar but larger and undecorated rattle (Pl. 10, h); thin brass ladle (Pl. 10, f); 23 tubular beads of sheet brass or copper (Pl. 2, 8); finger ring; 3 "hawk" bells (Pl. 2, 2; Pl. 10, b); and finally a strip of brass 14" x 1".

Glass Beads: In all, several thousand trade beads were recovered. Predominant here were small beads colored turquoise, dark blue, dull blue, white and red. Only one "star" bead occurred here, while the long tubular glass beads, usually red though occasionally blue, numbered twenty-six, two of which were of the "twisted" variety.

Several interesting features may be noted from an examination of these trade objects. One is the comparative abundance of iron:

"Primitive man was once believed to have so few needs that the only trade-articles he desired at first were those which gratified his love for ostentation. This has never been the case in New Guinea, where tribe after tribe of new, previously unknown peoples have been encountered, from the time of Finsch's explorations (1880-1882 and 1884) down to the present. Always they have first demanded iron tools: only after these most highly desired articles are in their hands will they show interest in beads, face paint and calico."7

The effect of the iron axe and knife upon traditional Iroquois life cannot be underestimated. Reflection will suggest the tremendous influence it must have had not only upon basic economic institutions, but aesthetic, social and political patterns as well.

Turning to the brass and copper specimens, one is immediately struck by the complete absence of kettles. This appears to be in keeping with data from

contemporary sites in the region and is perhaps to be explained in terms of their unavailability at so early a date and so far from the Atlantic coast. The metal rattlers are somewhat reminiscent of ones made of human skulls and found in Iroquois graves of this period.

Finally, the glass beads not only help to date the site but also suggest trade from the north rather than the east. While all of the forms represented here have been recovered on neighboring Seneca sites, their proportions and the near-absence of "star beads" would make them far more at home in Huronia or Neutral country.

Native Beads and Shell Ornaments

One small catlinite bead, triangular in cross-section, lay intermingled with glass and shell beads (Pl. 2, 4).

A total of 17 Gulf (?) shell ornaments were recovered, including 3 fragments of 2 badly exfoliated circular gorget-like pieces (Pl. 9, e); 12 beads of various forms including 2 made from the columella (Pl. 2, 5, 9-13, 15; Pl. 8, b; Pl. 9, d); and the end of a conch whorl (Pl. 9, c).

Objects of Stone

All projectile points found here (ten in number) are isosceles triangles made of local chert (Pl. 8). Five rather interesting chert scrapers (?) with serrated edges occurred with a single burial. Other than this, the only stone objects were a rectangular, square-sectioned whetstone showing little use and a pebble netsinker, possibly also used as a hammerstone (Pl. 3, 7).

Perishable Goods Preserved by Brass and Copper

Fragment of a beaver (?) pouch; woven blanket (?) scrap; necklace thongs; sundry pieces of fur and buckskin (Pl. 3, 3, 4); food in pottery jar; finely woven splint basketry (Pl. 10, f); bark shrouds.

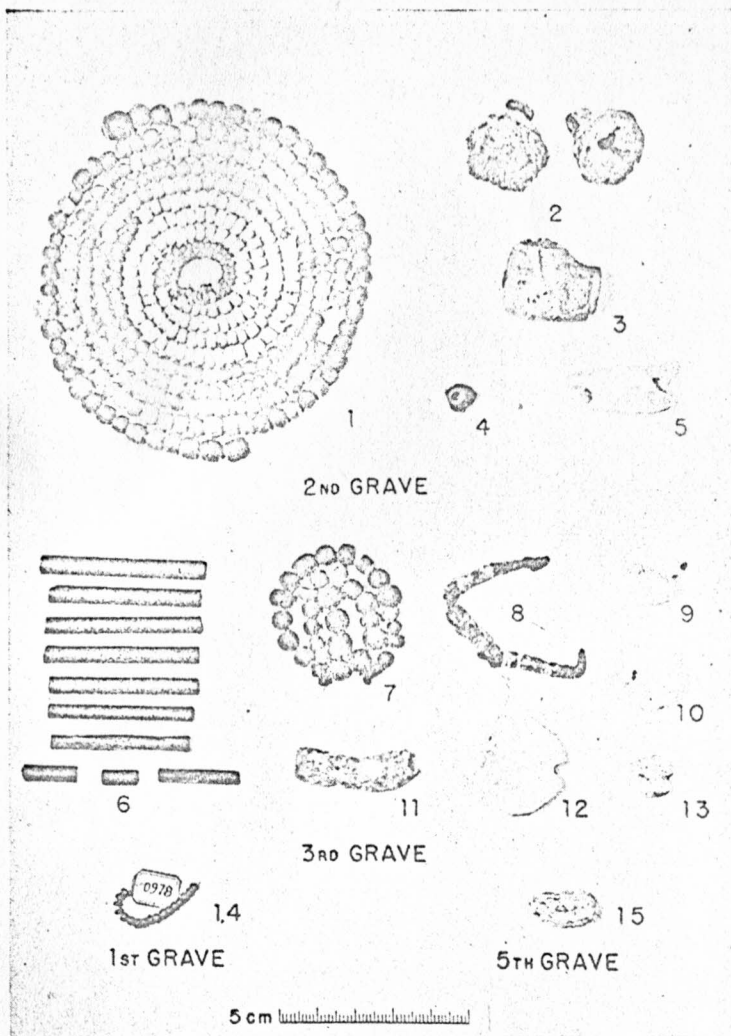


PLATE 2

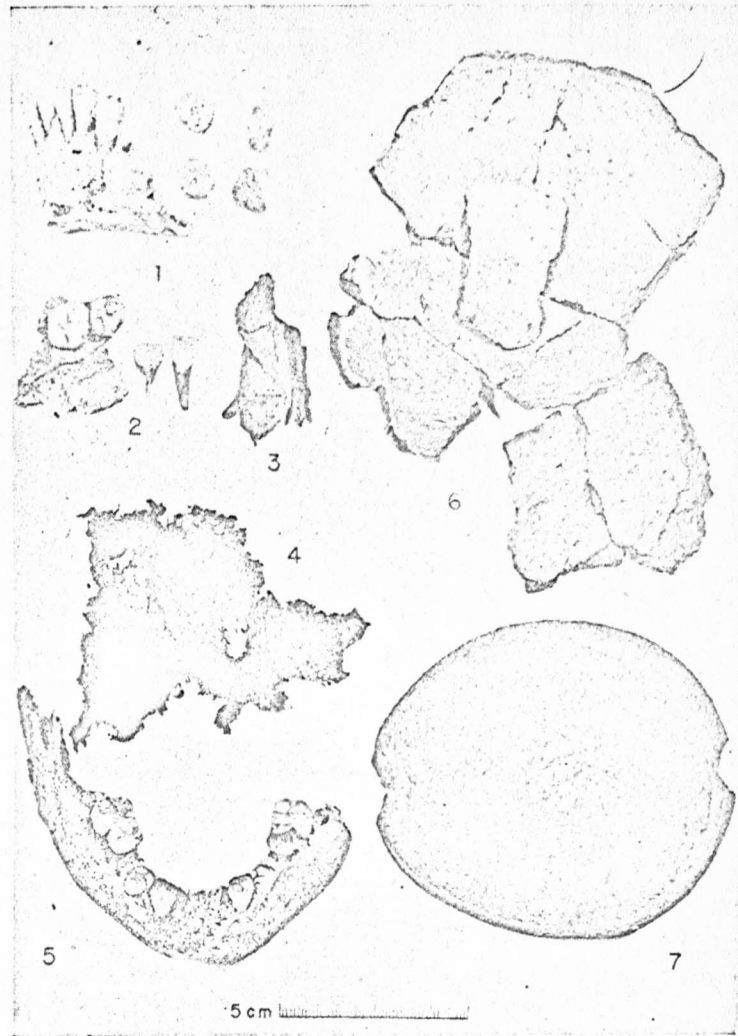


PLATE 3

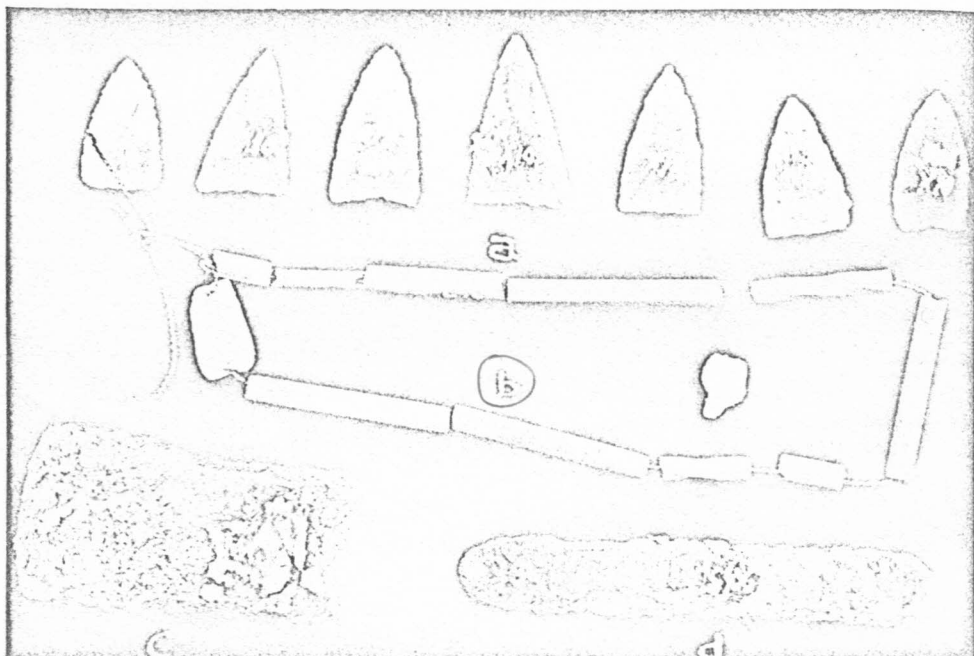


PLATE 8

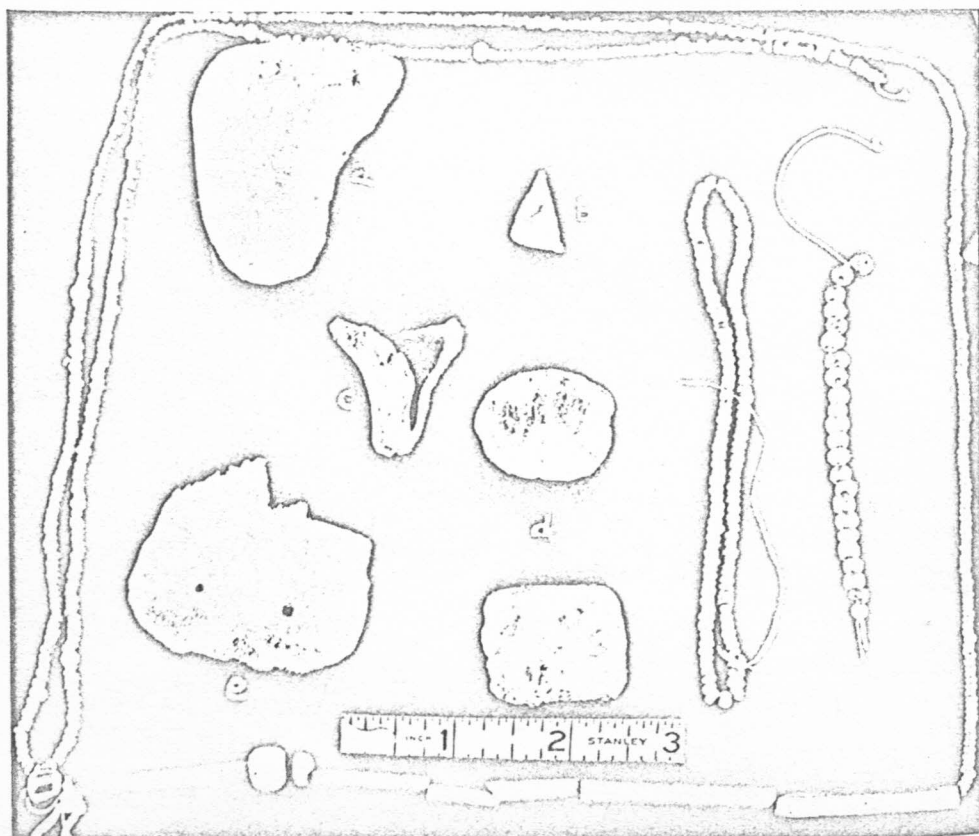


PLATE 9

Miscellaneous

Turtle shell cup, red and yellow ochre and vermillion; 2 lumps of blue pottery clay; objects described only as "bone implements."

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Reed, John Elmer; *History of Erie County, Pennsylvania*, Indianapolis 1925, Vol. I.
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- 2 Stanford, Laura G.; *History of Erie County*, 1894
- 3 *Erie Daily Times* of September 11, 1934
- 4 Parker, Arthur C.; *Excavations in an Erie Indian Village and Burial Site at Ripley, Chautauqua Co., N. Y.* New York State Museum Bulletin 418, Albany, 1907
- 5 Skinner, Alanson; *Notes on Iroquois Archaeology*. Indian Notes and Monographs, No. 18, Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, New York, 1921, plate 2.
- 6 Parker, *op. cit.*
- 7 Reed, Stepien Windsor; *The Making of Modern New Guinea*. Amer. Philos. Soc. Memiors Vol. XVIII, 1943, p. 254.

Here's a story from the Allegheny Seneca that's as down to earth as a fox's tail. When Henry Redeye was a young man, he married and took his wife to live in a one-room house on the Reservation. As his family increased, so did his house, for with the arrival of each child a new room was added until Henry had the largest and finest home in the valley. But as the children grew up to marry and move away, Henry tore down the extra rooms, one by one, to use for kindling, and today the Redeyes once more live alone - - - in their one-room house.